

# Oahu rail project moving apace to address traffic problems

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Honolulu's rail system continues to be in the news, and the time is right for an update and to provide key information on some important issues.

With construction of the guideway structures set to begin this fall along the 20-mile route, a new series of community meetings will soon begin regarding our station designs.

Contrary to recent reports from rail opponents, the rail stations will not be "aircraft carriers in the sky." In fact, our stations will take up a space of 240 feet long and 60 feet wide — hardly comparable to a 1,090-foot-long Nimitz class aircraft carrier.

Honolulu's new rail system will also be much quieter and smoother than older systems still operating in places such as New York, Chicago and Boston.

The alignment passes through a developed urban corridor, and sound barriers and other technological developments will help reduce noise levels. The sound of a train going by would be quieter than the sound of a passing bus at a distance of 50 feet.

Honolulu's system fits more in line with the new classification that is being recognized in the industry as a light metro, and is not a heavy rail system.

The shorter vehicle configuration and smaller-sized stations will be a better fit for Honolulu.

We have been working for years with several Native Hawaiian groups, business and community leaders, and other stakeholders to ensure the rail system fits in with its surrounding communities, and that Hawaii's sense of place is captured in our station design, transit artwork projects and more.

Surely most would agree that streets congested with fuel-burning cars and trucks and the pollution that goes along with that hardly represent Hawaii's sense of place.

Traffic will continue to worsen as our population grows. Rail will reduce congestion in the future — without rail, congestion will be far worse. Even Cliff Slater, a longtime rail opponent and a plaintiff in a lawsuit to block the project, admitted that fact during a July 2010 City Council hearing: "We don't disagree at all that rail will have an effect on reducing traffic congestion from what it might be if we did nothing at all," he said.

Clearly, we must act now before it gets much worse.

We have been in Washington, D.C., this week to discuss the project and to continue to pave the way for an upcoming federal Full-Funding Grant Agreement. It is always encouraging to see the confidence the Federal Transit Administration has repeatedly shown in Honolulu's rail project. The rail project already received \$120 million in federal funds and is on track to receive a total of \$1.55 billion in federal funding. The FTA would not be investing in our project if they had any doubts that it would succeed.

Yet opponents try to mislead the public, insisting the \$5.3 billion price tag will increase by billions of dollars.

The project's costs estimates are regularly reviewed and approved by the FTA. In fact, the FTA recently completed its cost and schedule risk assessment and concluded that Honolulu's cost estimates are done correctly.

After decades of discussions, meetings, hearings and debates, we're on the right course to address our traffic problems. It will take commitment from the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation (HART), state, city and federal officials and, above all, the community to stand up for the project as opponents try to bog down progress with lawsuits, delays and misinformation.

U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye offered some words of wisdom in his recent address to the HART board of directors. He said that it is very easy to be opposed to something, but "it is much more difficult to be for something because you have to stand up and take a lot of crap, to put it bluntly."

We couldn't agree more.